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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: KING URGES PARLIAMENT TO ACT ON POLITICAL REFORM
BILLS; LEGISLATORS TURN FIRST TO LEADERSHIP VOTES

REF: A) AMMAN 5945 B) AMMAN 7737 C) AMMAN 6334

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Summary: In an address to parliament, King Abdullah urged a focus on the government's political reform agenda, as well as combating poverty. End Summary.

¶2. (U) King Abdullah addressed the opening session of parliament for 20 minutes November 28. The speech, as is the tradition here, was interrupted at several points by shouts of "long live the King" and poems praising his achievements.

POLITICAL REFORM

¶3. (SBU) The speech laid out a broad and ambitious reform agenda. The King asserted that a national consensus was achieved at the "We are All Jordan" national unity conference in July (ref A), and called on the Parliament to enact the government's legislation in order to implement the conference's conclusions. At the top of the King's list were reform bills on political parties, municipal government, and the media -- legislation that the full parliament had not yet voted on by the time it adjourned September 28 (ref B).

LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS

¶4. (SBU) As expected, on November 28 MP Abdul Hadi al-Majali won a fourth term as Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Majali won 73 votes, while Zuhair Abu Al-Ragheb of the Islamic Action Front won 26 votes. Six ballots were submitted for "no one" or were left blank. Reacting to the results, Abu Ragheb thanked his supporters and criticized the government's performance and the "one man one vote" system. Note: The alternative usually advanced by some reformers and by the IAF is a two-vote system similar to Germany's. End note. Several MPs briefly left the chamber in protest.

OUSTED IAF MPs' SEATS

¶5. (SBU) The final status of the two IAF MPs convicted of fueling national discord with statements to the press after the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (ref C) remains controversial. In the view of the GOJ and many pro-government MPs, the case is closed, and Ali Abu al-Sukkar and Mohammed Abu Fares were automatically expelled from Parliament by virtue of their conviction in August. IAF bloc leader Azzam Al-Hunaidi, meanwhile, submitted a motion signed by 20 MPs calling for the Chamber to vote to determine the status of the two MPs in accordance with Article 90 of the

constitution. Hunaidi announced he plans to raise the issue at every sitting of the Chamber until the two are re-seated.

¶6. (C) Two MPs, Dr. Abdul Rahim Malhas and Fayez Shdeifat, missed the session without submitting an excuse. Malhas, a liberal who is highly critical of GOJ (and U.S.) foreign policy, later told poloff that he considered the opening session and subsequent committee nominations a "waste of time since everything was pre-cooked."

PUGILIST POLITICOS

¶7. (SBU) Along with poems for the King, another cherished parliamentary tradition here is the occasional punch-up during the committee assignments process. MPs Abed al-Thawabieh and Mohammad al-Adwan indulged in the sweet science in full view of several journalists December 12. When press photographers tried to cover the bout, three other MPs jumped the photographers and smashed their cameras. The next day Speaker Majali met with and apologized to the Journalists' Union, thereby heading off a threatened media boycott of Parliament. However, several papers are still boycotting the three MPs who attacked the pressmen: Ghaleb al-Zu'bi, Mufleh al-Rhaimi, and Hatem Sarayreh. All five parliamentary tough guys are pro-government East Bankers.

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